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Document Citation

Title	**'Lucifer Rising' : Kenneth Anger's sympathy for the Devil**
Author(s)	Jane Karr
Source	*After Dark*
Date	1977 Dec
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	62-65
No. of Pages	6
Subjects	Anger, Kenneth (1927), Santa Monica, California, United States
Film Subjects	Lucifer rising, Anger, Kenneth, 1973

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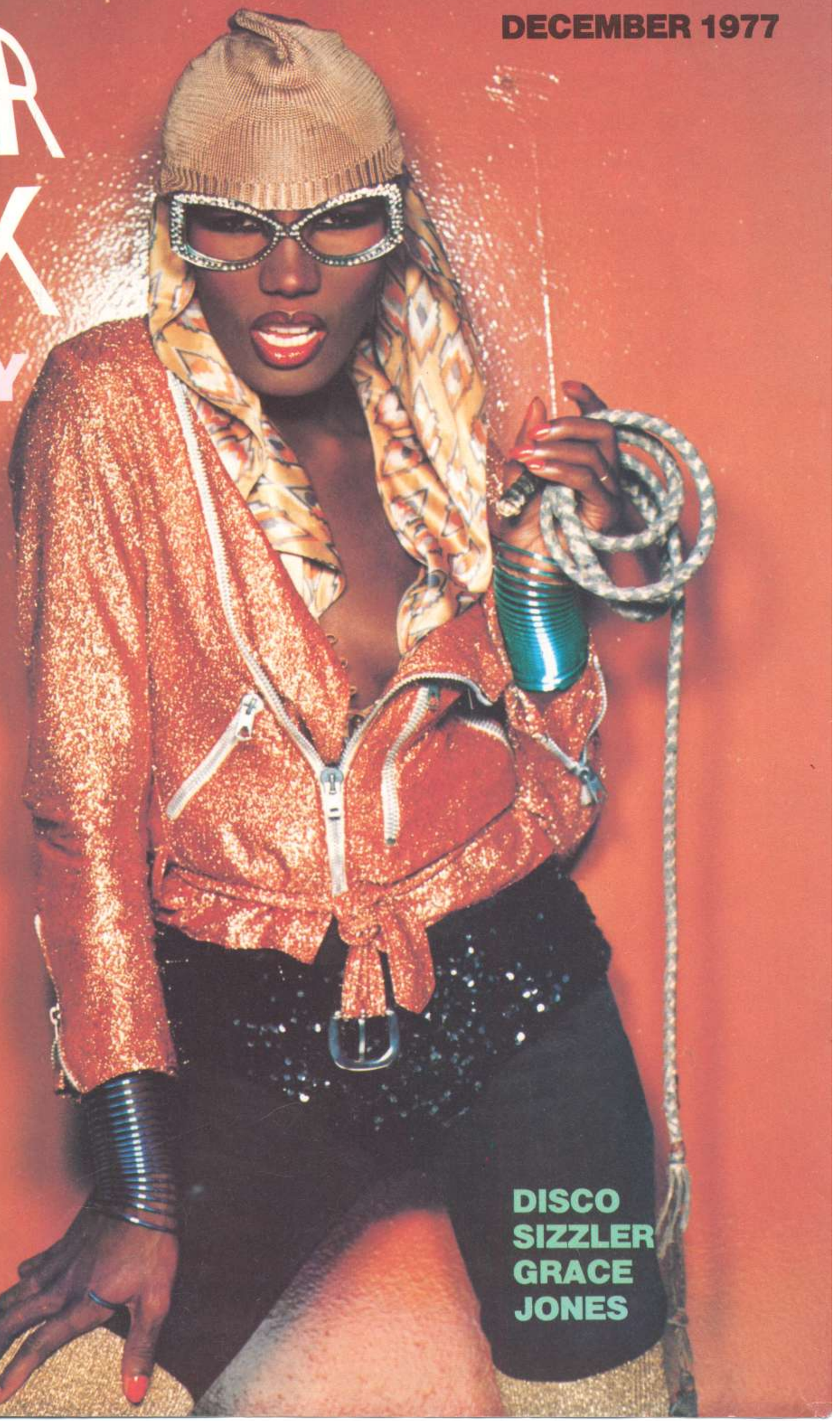
THE NATIONAL MAGAZINE OF ENTERTAINMENT

$1.50

DECEMBER 1977

AFTER DARK



FANTASY FUN FARE

KENNETH ANGER'S "LUCIFER RISING"

"THE WIZ" AND OTHER FILM FANTASIA

CABARET CAROLERS AND DECKED–OUT HOLLY WOODLAWN

A NEW COLETTE

DISCO SIZZLER GRACE JONES

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"LUCIFER RISING"

KENNETH ANGER'S SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

by Jane Karr

Kenneth Anger's name inspires images of magic, machines, and masochism; one expects a leather-clad skinhead with a greasy motorcycle chain hung limply around his collar. This is much of the misconception, or mystique, surrounding Anger, who only wears cowhide when caught in a snowstorm. The filmmaker is fond of motorcycles, but prefers collecting neon art, which illuminates the photographs of stars wallpapering his study. A stuffed vampire bat dangles languidly from an autographed photo of Bela Lugosi; a bulb-studded star and neon-trimmed violin are propped up in the corner; neon lips embrace the words *Hollywood Babylon*, the name of his 1960 best-seller tracing three decades of gossip about the pantheons of Tinseltown. In an adjacent room his lawyer pores over a rough copy of *Washington Babylon*, an irreverent pictorial panorama of U.S. administrations beginning with George Washington.

Anger, still sporting an impish profile at forty-seven, positions himself in a director's chair labeled "Anger" in his Upper West Side apartment. He will leave for his London flat the next day to add the final touches to *Lucifer Rising*, ten years in the making. As the conversation turns to *Lucifer*, Anger stiffens in his chair; his comments become so spontaneous they seem rehearsed. "I had trouble that has prevented me from completing *Lucifer* sooner, but I've gotten used to the idea. James Joyce worked on *Ulysses* for years. It's evolved, and that's why it's becoming interesting, more cosmic. It's a sympathetic view of what's usually called the devil, the personification of evil. The title implies that Lucifer is forgiven, ascending back to heaven—heresy according to Catholicism. I don't think the Protestants have gotten around to these details."

Since the offset, *Lucifer* has been beset with problems, perhaps caused by the intervening hand of some disapproving deity. One of the major obstacles was selecting an actor to play the lead. The first choice was a five-year-old named Godot, who fell through a skylight to his death. Anger then chose Bobby Beausoleil, who after a falling out with Anger broke down the door to the filmmaker's studio, removed the footage of himself (as if retracting love letters), and buried it in the Mojave Desert. Beausoleil (meaning "beautiful sun" in French) was later convicted at the age of twenty-one of murdering musician Gary Hinman, suspected to be connected with the Manson massacre. He now serves a life sentence in San Quentin and will be eligible for parole in 1980. Beausoleil still signs "Lucifer" to his letters, which meet the prison's two-page maximum. He was hit on the head during a prison riot with a baseball bat, fracturing his jaw. As a result, his eyesight is failing, Anger says to explain the large writing, almost half-an-inch in size.

Lucifer number three was Mick Jagger, who composed the score for Anger's *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969), an eleven-minute politically flavored short using clippings culled from the original *Lucifer* not destroyed by Beausoleil. Jagger backed out, much to Anger's relief, and was replaced by his younger brother Chris, who also resigned. Finally Anger discovered a "natural," a steel-mill worker named Leslie Huggins from Middlesborough, England. Anger has teamed the new Lucifer (an Aries) with Marianne Faithfull, who plays Lilith, the demon of destruction. It was almost a case of typecasting, since Faithfull has attempted to take her own life three times—twice with heroin. The role actually worked as psychodrama, helping her work out the character of Lilith, as well as her own problems. The most recent delay was caused by Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page, who was commissioned to write the score. When after three years Anger discovered Page had written only twenty-six minutes, the composer was fired. Beausoleil, formerly the lead guitarist with an acid-rock group named Love, wrote and recorded the soundtrack in San Quentin with the assistance of twenty-five fellow prisoner-musicians. Biweekly calls (collect, of course) to Anger keep him informed on the film's progress.

With these omnipresent obstacles defiantly hurdled, Anger has completed his most ambitious venture yet, rolling with the punches, molding celluloid like so much putty. The germ for *Lucifer Rising* came from a poem by Aleister Crowley, the controversial nineteenth-century magic(k)ian (the *k* signifies the Crowley cult). "Hymn to Lucifer," which on first reading appears to be a description of the sun rising and touching the horizon, is symbolic of Lucifer rising from hell. Anger's original concept, however, has changed since he first read the poem. The first, unfinished version of *Lucifer* was an angry statement, eventually edited into *Invocation*, an abrasive film made during the final days of the Vietnam War. The current *Lucifer* is the antithesis of *Scorpio Rising* (1966), which centers on destruction and death. "Lucifer was the name given by the Romans to the morning star, meaning brilliance of the light of the sunrise," Anger asserts. "It is the angel of light who heralds God. He was the most beautiful of the angels, but beauty was his constant downfall. The fact that the angels were beginning to flock around him instead of God caused this expulsion to take place. You can't read chapter after chapter on this. It's hinted at, and I claim that at some stage the Holy Books were censored and edited. There are too many gaps in the story. God created him, and, in a sense, what happens afterward you could say comes back to God.

"It's the only way such things as evil and cruelty and stupidity, which to me is as appalling as cruelty, can exist in the world—as part of some master plan that will all work out eventually. In a way, I'm sort of broaching this idea in my movie. That's why my movie will be a breakthrough," Anger says. "The devil has received 'bad press,' becoming the scapegoat of commercial horror films like *The Exorcist*, which is blatantly inaccurate. The devil wouldn't bother to possess a little girl, because he doesn't have to. A demon, on the other hand, would, and often will. There's quite a lot of demonic possession around, but it isn't the devil. Demons are the equivalent of an infantry to a general. I have a book that names two thousand six hundred of them. If you believe in them, then you believe in angels, and both balance each other out. But this is the invisible world that to some people is a bit more real than the real world. I live a normal life. It doesn't change things." Normalcy is defined as that which conforms to the standard or common type. Daniel Webster would never select Kenneth Anger as an e.g. to such a definition. His background illustrates everything but conformity to established mores.

Anger began his prolific film career at the age of three as the changeling prince in Max

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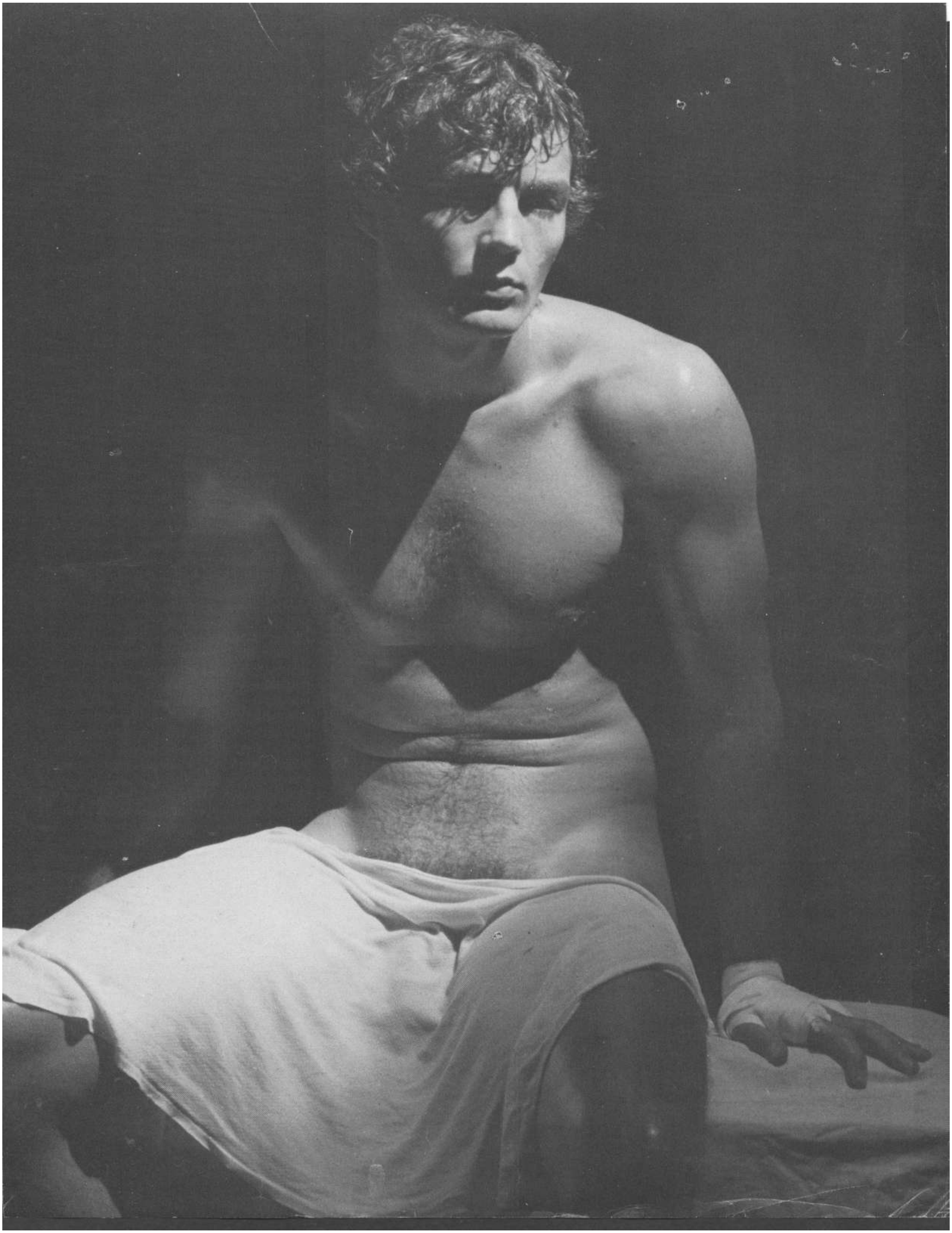

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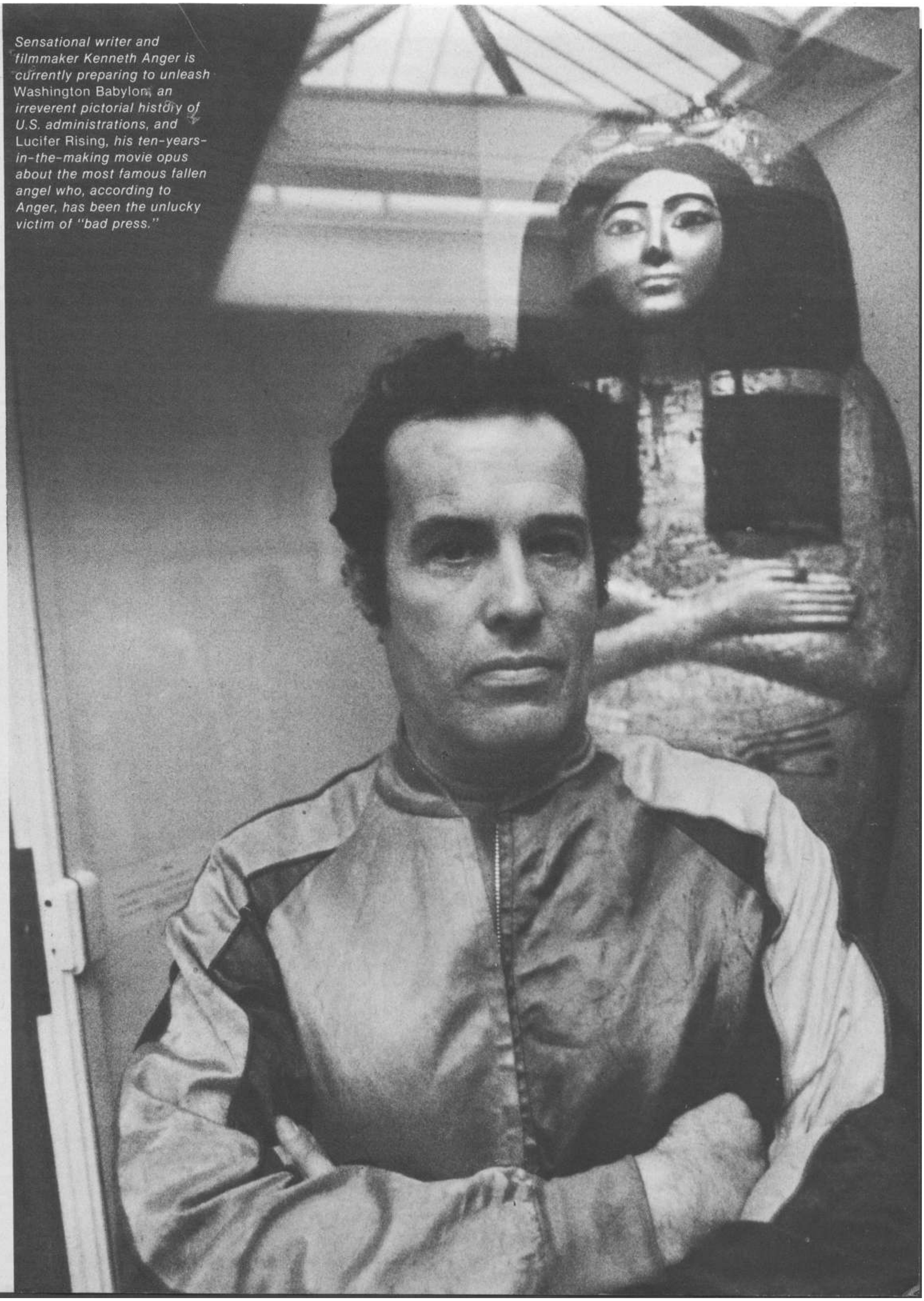
Sensational writer and filmmaker Kenneth Anger is currently preparing to unleash Washington Babylon, *an irreverent pictorial history of U.S. administrations, and* Lucifer Rising, *his ten-years-in-the-making movie opus about the most famous fallen angel who, according to Anger, has been the unlucky victim of "bad press."*



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Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Surrounded by a make-believe world of cellophane moonbeams, he became both a participant in and an observor of the Hollywood milieu. Although the young Anger's father, an aeronautics engineer for Douglas Aircraft Corporation, wanted his son to follow in his footsteps, his grandmother, a wardrobe mistress for silent films with star-struck ideas about her grandson, kept Anger closely aligned with the arts.

He soon stepped out of the spotlight and behind the camera, filming the Genet-esque *Fireworks* at the age of seventeen during a weekend when his parents were out of the house attending an uncle's funeral. The only clues to the now-epic proceedings were suspect scorch marks on the fireplace. Jean Cocteau later saw and praised the film, placing Anger back in the spotlight and luring him across the Atlantic, where the film was shown at the Biarritz Festival. *Fireworks* (1947), a raucous, searing vision of sadomasochism and sailors, set the stage for further Anger cinematics: *Rabbit's Moon* (1950), a commedia dell'arte piece; *Eaux D'Artifice* (1953), a baroque nocturnal journey; and *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954), a hallucinatory enactment of the bacchic rite. His most well-known work, *Scorpio Rising*, served as a landmark case for frontal nudity when seized by the felony vice squad in 1964 after a complaint was issued by the California Nazis, offended by the film's blasphemous treatment of the swastika. *Scorpio*, winner of the Grand Prix at the Evian Festival in France, was exonerated of obscenity charges when brought before the state supreme court, setting a precedent for future obscenity cases.

In order to finance further film ventures, Anger wrote *Hollywood Babylon*, the original out-of-print French version now selling for $300. Anger told the world about Bogart's overendowed privates and Marlene Dietrich's sewing circle. In *Washington Babylon*, scheduled for publication next year, Anger has caught the bureaucracy with its pants down. Starting with the father of our country (Washington grew cannabis on Mount Vernon), through Watergate (a snapshot of Nixon and Rebozo that "looks like they're on a honeymoon"), to the current administration (Carter held a statewide Honor Calley Day in Georgia), Anger has picked and nitpicked the nation's finest in this satiric sweepstakes. "It's all part of folk history. People say 'gossip' and they'll scorn it. On the other hand, everybody gossips. Gossip is the edges of history and you have a chunk of history in the middle. In China you are missing the gossip, or the social history, that would round things out, like what was the relationship between Madame Mao and Mao? This isn't normal. Gossip isn't allowed in print or on television, because you have a state-controlled press. It's more than gossip to know what's going on between the two: Who's really running the show, and was she really trying to take over?"

Anger insists that *Washington Babylon* is an affectionate love pat. Granted, apple pie and the American flag don't typify the man who was self-exiled in England for seven years to protest the Vietnam War. The tattoo on his arm doesn't say "mom" (the seal of Lucifer is imprinted on his right arm; the seal of Crowley on his left), and Anger's ideology does not have its roots firmly implanted in the American Way.

His parents tried to mold him into the quintessential Presbyterian, but Anger, although coming from this religiously austere family of Hollywood Puritans (no smoking, no drinking), chose his own mode of religion through Crowley, who he has studied for twenty years. In the fifties, Anger met the appointed successor to Crowley, Jack Parsons, a scientist who was credited with the invention of jet fuel propulsion and was killed during an explosion (sabotage, Anger says). Through Parsons, Anger was introduced to Crowley's books, and he now owns the largest collection of Crowley paintings.

Crowley's influence on Anger's work has taken many forms. One is in his use of color. Each color has magical vibrations, complementing each other and therefore affecting the subconscious. Anger used the science of chromatic experience in *Invocation*, designed in dark blue and deep red, and in *Scorpio Rising*, designed in Chinese red, orange, and metallic green. Anger has also just completed the script on a fictionalized, biographical film about Crowley.

A jack-of-all-trades, Anger writes, directs, and produces his own ventures. He designed the sets and costumes for *Lucifer*, utilizing ancient Egyptian makeup techniques. The characters Isis and Osiris were made up using actual tomb paintings as models. The headdresses were five-feet high, causing some problem with the high-velocity Egyptian winds. *Lucifer* was filmed in part in Egypt, India, Germany, and England at a cost of only about $50,000, a third of that amount coming out of Anger's pocket. Other funding sources were the British Film Bank and German TV, backers since the inception of the project.

One investor went bankrupt waiting for the release of *Lucifer*, but on the whole Anger's projects are financial and critical successes. So successful that Anger has been plagued by a series of suits to protect his property, such as the illegal distribution of his films in 1973, the pirating of *Hollywood Babylon* in an unauthorized English translation in 1965, and an unauthorized film based on the book (Anger has plans for his own film version using documentary archive footage). And so successful that a limited number of private collector's films have been made and placed in museums throughout the world. John Paul Getty, Jr., owns a copy of *Senators in Bondage* (1976), an animated, politically motivated film. Anger was also commissioned by his French publisher, J.J. Pauvert, to make the original *L'Histoire d'O* in France years before the current film was made. *L'Histoire* was never completed because the female star was forced to quit because her father was a minister of finance in the De Gaulle administration. He thought his daughter was slipping out of the house to take harpsichord lessons, not skirting the fine line between the artistic and the pornographic.

An Anger film, although approaching sexuality in a bold, unorthodox manner, only reveals brief flashes of nudity, relying on the imagination to fill in the gaps. "If I did the same films again, I wouldn't put any more in it. I doubt if I'd ever make a hard-core film, even if I was given carte blanche. In its own way, it's limiting. You have to include so much action footage. It's another form of restriction." Anger's films, unlike those by such contemporaries as the late Pier Paolo Pasolini, make a more personal statement about sex; only two out of some twenty contain violence: *Fireworks*, which explores the fantasy rape of a boy tracked down by a group of sailors who flirt with him and then beat him up, and *Scorpio Rising*, the saga of a motorcycle gang ("Scorpio is the sign of the zodiac ruling the genitals and machines. The motorcycle is a sexual symbol").

Anger's filmic approach to sexuality so impressed Professor Alfred Kinsey that he asked Anger to participate in the monumental *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Kinsey first approached Anger to purchase *Fireworks* for the University of Indiana and then hired him as a consultant to assess his personal collection of more than 5,000 films. "Let's say a police department in Memphis confiscates a blue film. Through the years Kinsey built up contacts. Instead of throwing out the films, they'd ship them to Dr. K.—Prok, as he was known. He had some that were from 1910. The earlier they were, the better you could see the distance time gives to things. They become more quaint. For instance, the ones from around 1900—the people really looked different. The idea of beauty then was the hourglass figure: women with very heavy thighs, big hips and bosoms. They did funny things, like wearing domino masks, as if this would conceal their identity. In the twenties, the guys always kept on their socks and garters and wore pomaded Valentino hair styles. In the forties, there were the girls with beehives and pompadors. Bobby socks would identify those in the Sinatra period, about 1942. Kinsey had no idea when the films were made, so I gave an educated guess. It was no particular erotic trip."

In the year 2000, some researcher may chronicle the seventies by assessing an Anger film. By reviewing *Lucifer*, he might discover the carnal escapades of the devil; a burgeoning optimism wherein even satan finds solace and forgiveness; or the primal screams of the Age of Aquarius. The very least to discover is the limitless boundary of Anger's imagination. Anger has been promising *Lucifer* for almost ten years, but if the stars (and press agents) are right, the saga of satan will ascend in the new year, a landmark both cinematically and theologically.

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At left:
After participating in initiation rites involving sacrificial blood, Hayden Coote as the High Priest in Kenneth Anger's Lucifer Rising *takes a bath of purification.*

Below:
Ethiopian model Myrian Gibril plays the Egyptian goddess Isis in Lucifer Rising.

At right:
"Lucifer was the name given by the Romans to the morning star, meaning brilliance of the light of the sunrise," Kenneth Anger asserts. A sunrise ritual is conducted in this scene from Lucifer Rising *that was filmed at the ancient ruins of Stonehenge in England.*

Photos courtesy of Kenneth Anger

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